

MODULAR BASE FOR INDUSTRIAL TOOLS

The following patent application claims priority of provisional patent application serial no. 60/524,796 filed November 25, 2003.

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to modular tooling, and in particular, a modular base adaptable to releasably receive an industrial machine having a fixture and/or tooling.

Background of the Invention

Due to the development of a worldwide marketplace, the manufacturing industry has become extremely competitive. One of the largest cost in the manufacturing industry, and one which has been on the rise for the past couple of years, has been the cost of fixtures and tooling for industrial machinery. The reason for the high cost is that the fixtures and tooling for the industrial machinery are typically customized for a specific operation and/or workpiece. In addition, various companies and/or manufacturing facilities may require different specifications for their industrial machinery thereby requiring machine builders to further customize their machines.

The problem with customizing such industrial machinery is that the machinery must either be replaced or rebuilt if the manufacturing operation and/or workpiece is changed. In

addition, customization of the equipment may prevent the machinery from being transferred to another company or manufacturing facility due to the machinery not meeting the receiving company or manufacturing facility's specifications. Even when the equipment can be rebuilt for a new operation, workpiece, or manufacturing facility, the rebuilding costs are often prohibitive since fixturing and tooling must typically be replaced. Thus, the rebuilding of the machinery to remove and replace the fixturing and/or tooling often dictates that the user simply purchase new equipment.

It would be desirable to provide an industrial piece of machinery that was modular in design so that the fixturing and/or tooling of the industrial machinery could easily be replaced without the cost of having to rebuild and/or replace the surrounding equipment.

Summary of the Invention

The present invention relates to a modular base for industrial machinery that allows for the fixturing and tooling of an industrial machine to be replaced without having to realize the cost of having to rebuild and/or replace the surrounding equipment. The present invention provides a mounting table adaptable to be releasably connected to the industrial machine. A plurality of telescopically adjustable legs are connected to the mounting table for adjustably positioning the mounting table to a desired height. A plurality of rollers are connected to the legs for rollably moving the mounting table to a desired location. A plurality of mounting platforms are coupled to the mounting table and are adaptable to be releasably fixtured to a foundation. Each leg has an electric drive connected thereto for driving the telescopic adjustment of the legs. A lighting fixture is connected to and extends from the mounting table and is adaptable to cast light on the industrial machinery. A programmable controller is

coupled to the mounting table and is adaptable to be in communication with the industrial machine. A pneumatic controller is coupled to the mounting table and is adaptable to communicate with the industrial machine. A control panel is coupled to and in communication with the programmable controller and is adaptable to manipulate the industrial machine.

Brief Description of the Drawings

The description herein makes reference to the accompanying drawings, wherein like referenced numerals refer to like parts throughout several views, and wherein:

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a modular base for industrial machinery of the present invention.

FIG. 2 is a plan side view of the modular base for industrial machinery of the present invention.

FIG. 3 is a front plan view of the modular base for industrial machinery of the present invention.

FIG. 4 is a top plan view of the modular base for industrial machinery of the present invention.

Description of the Preferred Embodiment

Referring to the drawings, the present invention will now be described in detail with reference to the disclosed embodiment.

Figs. 1-4 illustrate a modular base **10** for receiving and supporting industrial machine **12** having various types of fixturing (not shown) and tooling (not shown). Although not limited in its use, the modular base **10** is ideally suited for industrial machinery **12**, such as

automobile headrest stuffers, automobile headrest closures, automobile armrest paddle compression stuffers, paddle compression fixtures, etc. The modular base **10** provides a mounting table **14** that is adaptable to releasably receive the industrial machine **12**. Four adjustable legs **16** and a light fixture **18** are connected to the mounting table **14**, wherein the light fixture **18** extends over the industrial machine **12** to cast light on the industrial machine **12** and its surrounding area. A programmable controller **20** is connected to the mounting table **14** of the modular base **10** and is in communication with the industrial machine **12**. A pneumatic controller **22** is connected to the programmable controller **20** and is adapted to communicate with the industrial machine **12**. A control panel **24** is connected to the mounting table **14** and is in communication with the programmable controller **20**. The control panel **24** is adaptable to manipulate the industrial machine **12**.

Attention is drawn to the fact that the mounting table **14** has a plate-like, substantially U-shaped configuration so that a user may stand within the opening of the U-shaped configuration and gain access to the industrial machine **12**. The mounting table **14** has a plurality of apertures **25** extending therethrough whereby the industrial machine **12** may be releasably connected to the mounting table **14** by releasable fasteners, such as threaded bolts and nuts (not shown). The mounting table **14** is fabricated from hot rolled steel to provide a material that will support the weight of the industrial machine **12**.

For the purpose of casting light on the industrial machine **12**, the light fixture **18** is connected to and extends upward from the mounting table **14**. The light fixture **18** provides a substantially L-shaped frame **27** having a pair of spaced vertical supports **26** that are substantially parallel to one another and are connected to the mounting table **14** by threaded fasteners **29**. A pair of horizontal supports **28** of the light fixture **18** extend outward from the

vertical supports **26** at a position above the industrial machine **12**. The horizontal supports **28** are substantially parallel to one another and extend at substantially right angles to the vertical supports **26**. A cross-member **30** connects the ends of the horizontal supports **28** at a substantially right angle to the horizontal supports **28**. The horizontal supports **28** extend over the industrial machine **12** substantially parallel to the mounting table **14**. A fluorescent light **31** is connected to the horizontal supports **28** and hangs over the industrial machine **12** to cast light on the industrial machine **12**. An electrical outlet **32** may be connected to the vertical supports **26** of the light fixture **18** to supply electrical power to any supplemental machinery or tooling that may require electrical power.

It is contemplated that to position and support the mounting table **14**, means for adjusting the position of the mounting table **14** includes four legs **16** that are connected to the underside of the mounting table **14**. Each leg **16** has a pair of substantially parallel, substantially vertical supports **34, 42**. The first support **34** includes a substantially rectangular column **35** having an L-shaped bracket **36** that is adjustably mounted to the column **35**. A plurality of apertures **38** extend through the column **35**, and fasteners (not shown) mounted on the L-shaped bracket **36** engage the apertures **38** therein. The fasteners on the L-shaped bracket **36** may engage any of the apertures **38** provided in column **35** in order to adjust the height of the L-shaped bracket **36**. Each L-shaped bracket **36** has a caster wheel **40** mounted thereon. The caster wheels **40** allow the modular base **10** to be rolled into a desired position.

The second support **42** has a telescopic, substantially rectangular column **43** wherein each column **43** has an electric drive **44** mounted between the column **43** and the mounting table **14** to electrically drive telescopic adjustment of the second supports **42**. The electrical drives **44** may also provide a leveling adjustment to the modular base **10** by adjusting the

height of each column **43** individually. The drives **44** are electrically connected to a central drive controller **45** to actuate and control the drives **44**. Although the present invention is ideally suited for powered telescopic adjustment of the second supports **42** by the electric drives **44**, the telescopic adjustment of the second supports **42** may be manually or mechanically adjusted by utilizing a pin (not shown) inserted within corresponding apertures (not shown) provided within the second supports **42**.

To secure the mounting table **14** to the foundation, means for releasably securing the mounting table **14** to the foundation include the use of four mounting plates **46**. The mounting plates **46** are connected to the bottom of each of the columns **43** of the second supports **42**, and each mounting plate **46** has a pair of apertures **48** extending therethrough. Releasable fasteners (not shown) may extend through the apertures **48** of the mounting plates **46** in order to releasably connect the modular base **10** to the foundation.

In order to provide programming capability to the industrial machine **12**, the programmable controller **20** is mounted to the underside of the mounting table **14**. The industrial machine **12** is wired to the programmable controller **20** to provide electronic communication between the programmable controller **20** and the industrial machine **12**. The control panel **24** is mounted to a bracket **50** which is connected to the mounting table **14**. The bracket **50** supports the control panel **24** in a position whereby the user may easily access the control panel **24**. The control panel **24** is in communication with the programmable controller **20** so that the industrial machine **12** may be manipulated through the actuation and use of the control panel **24**. Although the present invention is ideally suited for the use of the electrical programmable controller **20**, a pneumatic controller (not shown) may also be utilized in substitution thereof.

Since the industrial machine **12** often utilizes a supply of pressurized air, the pneumatic controller **22** provides an air regulator **52** and an air actuator **54** connected to the programmable controller **20**. The pneumatic controller **22** is in communication with a pressurized air source (not shown) and the programmable controller **20** such that the actuation of the pneumatic controller **22** is controlled by signals received from the programmable controller **20**.

In operation, the industrial machine **12** is releasably fastened to the mounting table **14**. The programmable controller **20** is wired to the industrial machine **12** to manipulate the industrial machine **12** in a desired fashion. The pneumatic controller **22** is also connected to the industrial machine **12** so that the proper pneumatic controls are provided. The modular base **10** and the industrial machine **12** may then be rolled into its proper position through the use of the caster wheels **40**. Once the modular base **10** and the industrial machinery **12** are in the proper position, the second supports **42** of the legs **16** may then be vertically adjusted by use of the electrical drives **44**. Once the proper height of the industrial machinery **12** is determined, the modular base **10** may be mounted to the foundation through the use of the mounting plates **46**. If light is desired to be cast on the industrial machinery **12**, the fluorescent light **31** on the light fixture **18** may be actuated.

While the invention has been described in connection with what is presently considered to be the most practical and preferred embodiment, it is to be understood that the invention is not to be limited to the disclosed embodiments, but to the contrary, it is intended to cover various modifications or equivalent arrangements included within the spirit and scope of the appended claims which scope is intended to be accorded the broadest interpretation so as to encompass all such modifications and equivalent structures as is permitted under the law.